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Peter Altmann, Review of Cynthia Schafer-Elliott, *Food in Ancient Judah: Domestic Cooking in the Time of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013). Hardcover, pp.xii +239. ISBN: 978-1-908049-73-5.

This monograph, a revised version of S-E's dissertation advised by Diane Edelman at the University of Sheffield, investigates domestic cooking in Iron Age IIB–C Judah. The study moves from household archaeology of several specific loci to discussion of the literature and iconography of surrounding cultures, to biblical narrative portraits of cooking in Gen 18; 25; Judg 6:19–21; and 2 Sam 13:5–10.

S-E begins by noting that despite the current prevalence of the subject of food in archaeology and biblical studies, there is a general lack of discussion concerning food preparation in ancient domestic contexts. Her introduction also highlights the difference between the questions she had originally *hoped* to address—the differences between Iron Age and Persian period food preparation techniques—and the actual guiding investigation of the book—the differences between rural and urban preparation techniques in Iron Age IIB–C (p.2). The lack of both readily identifiable Persian period sites and of well-documented archaeological reports that allow for spatial analysis limit the possible scope of the study significantly.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to the methodological questions involved in the attempt to triangulate material culture, ethnography/ethnoarchaeology, and studies of biblical (and extra-biblical) texts. Most important here are the discussions of what is meant by a “household” and the spatial analysis at the base of household archaeology. The first emphasizes the distinctions *and* connections between a physical household dwelling and the actions that take place there by the members of social household entity based there. This analysis seeks to illuminate the path from situated material finds to the activities that took place at the location. The key link here is the incorporation of spatial analysis of individual dwellings. This method seeks to identify the specific locations of certain basic activities—in this case food production—on the basis of concentrations of food and preparation remains in certain parts of particular rooms. These locations are designated “activity areas,” and they lead S-E to pinpoint food preparation locations. This chapter also introduces the author's understanding of the relationship between Syro-Palestinian archaeology and biblical texts, as well as various other disciplines used in the study. As an important side note for her study, S-E assumes Judaeen provenance for the biblical narratives (p.24), which reflect Iron Age IIB–C contexts (p.9).

Chapter 2 focuses on identification of the difference between urban and rural in the biblical vocabulary. In interaction with earlier scholarship, S-E carries out word studies of עִיר and חָצֵר, concluding that the distinction made in the biblical texts is based primarily on whether a settlement is walled or not, rather than demography, size, planning, or administrative function. Her lexical analysis might have benefited from interaction with such sources as *TWOT*, *HALOT*, and *DCH*.

“A Spatial Analysis of Iron II Judahite Settlements” (chapter 3), brings together insights from four in-depth household-archaeological studies of dwellings—two urban and two rural. The dwellings from the two urban sites, Lachish and Tell Halif, date to Iron Age II B, while the finds from the two rural sites, Khirbet er-Ras and Pisgat Ze'ev, are dated to Iron Age II C. S-E's key methodological insight relates to the specific and detailed analysis of the precise locations of various finds related to food production and consumption within the rooms of particular dwellings themselves. In so doing, S-E can then point to the most probable locations within individual dwellings for food production. Her analysis also pays close attention the particular types of cooking related pottery at each of the sites, upon which she makes inferences about the kinds of foods consumed at the site. Her analysis leans heavily on the identification of remains of ovens (tabun or tannur) as the most telling locations for food preparation.

She concludes that urban dwellings, while smaller in size, utilized larger cooking vessels (the traditional cooking pot and hybrid pot) than the rural farmsteads, while were larger but used smaller vessels (pp.110–11). The implication is that the size of the pot reflects the type of food prepared rather than the size of the household (p. 113).

The following short chapter, “Broader Perspectives: Art, Literature, and Ethnography,” focuses primarily on baking and cooking practices from the Old Babylonian recipes published by J. Bottéro and modern (esp. Bedouin) groups in the Middle East. Here the ethnographic observations prove particularly enlightening, demonstrating the pragmatics of using tabun, tanur, and saj type cooking installations.

Biblical texts portraying food preparation form the topic of the final substantive chapter. The author addresses each of the four texts by first placing it in its synchronic narrative context, then addressing the questions of who, for whom, where, when, how, why, and which food is prepared. The concentrated focus on food preparation contains significant insights, like the practical implications of *cooking* rather than *baking* of dough in 2 Sam 13:9 and the indication of male participation in domestic cooking as portrayed in Jacob’s stew in Gen 25. The distinctions in context of hospitality (Gen 18), possibly cultic-medicinal (2 Sam 13), and the strange nature of Gideon’s cooking in Judg 6 take on more defined shapes as a result of the investigation. Nonetheless, it also becomes clear just how difficult it is to identify a number of practicalities for the narratives: many questions regarding how one imagines the use of cooking vessels, and where exactly in the domestic sphere the cooking displayed in the narratives could be imagined to have taken place remain foggy. As only one of the narratives is set (in terms of narrated time) in Iron II (2 Sam 13), and this one takes place in a *royal* context, the difficulty comes without surprise. Yet these are the extant narratives.

The study ends with a general conclusion, endnotes, bibliography, and indices of ancient texts, modern authors, and subjects.

### Evaluation

S-E no doubt brings new analysis to the study of the ancient ruins and texts, and this fact means that scholarship stands enriched through this contribution. The detailed implementation of spatial analysis combined with the ethnographic and other sources provides a new window into ancient food preparation. As a textual scholar, her detailed explanations in the methodology chapter enlighten me on the significance and challenges involved in such a study.

As noted above, it takes on the guise of a “pilot study,” given the sparse data available. While the current availability of the data is not the fault of the author, this factor reduces the impact of the conclusions. Can urban sites really be said to have different foodways in Iron IIB–C Palestine based on two Iron IIB urban sites and two Iron IIC rural sites?

Finally, when considering the analysis of the biblical texts, two questions arose repeatedly. First, to what degree do the chosen texts really reflect *domestic* and everyday cooking settings? The Genesis texts depict a nomadic existence, which is different than the urban or rural archaeological situations, while the Gideon and Tamar narratives are exceptional for other reasons. And second, what if (some of) these texts reflect the Persian period? The introduction notes that if the texts did arise later, this would pose a considerable problem for the monograph’s methodology, yet I missed direct argumentation and support for the reflection of an Iron II situation in the texts. Also, as a small note, significant engagement with secondary literature on these biblical texts is generally limited to older standards (e.g., Gunkel, Soggin, Westermann, McCarter). These works are, of course, important in themselves,

but scholarship has developed considerably in subsequent years.